



Scaling Up Counseling and Testing In Nigeria

Emergency Plan Supports CT Services in Six States

Nigeria, the most populous nation in Africa accounts for approximately 20 percent of West Africa's population, and is one of the countries with the highest number of HIV infections in the sub region. As a result more people are in need of HIV and AIDS related services, including counseling and testing, being an important entry point to care and support services. The ambitious target of the Government of Nigeria (GoN) to put 250,000 people on ART requires that more people know their status in order to benefit from AIDS related services, especially anti-retroviral therapy program.

Family Health International Nigeria, the largest provider of CT services in the country has supported the national government to scale up counseling and testing services in both public and private institutions. Establishing the first VCT site in country in 2002, FHI with funding from the United States Government have scaled up services in 86 sites, consisting of integrated, stand alone and mobile services provided by public, faith based and private organizations in 6 states of the 36 states and the federal capital territory. The massive scale up of services has been made possible with funding from U. S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief since 2004.

Recent estimates from the last National Sentinel Survey in 2005 indicate that adult HIV prevalence rate has increased steadily from 1.8% in 1991 to over 4.4%, with infection rates in some parts of the country as high as 10%. With a population of 140,000,000 million and approximately 3 million persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLHA), the country has the highest number of HIV/AIDS-infected adults in West Africa and one of the highest HIV/AIDS disease burden in the world.

The knowledge of HIV status pushes individuals to reduce their risk of acquiring or transmitting HIV infection and to access care if they are infected. In Nigeria only 6% of women and 14% of men in Nigeria report ever being tested for HIV (NDHS 2003). And only 3% of women and 6 % of men reported having being tested and receiving results in twelve month preceding the survey (NDHS 2003). The existing latent demand for CT and a potential for new demand shows a great need for the strengthening of CT services. However this situation is changing quickly as a result of the intervention of partners with the support of the Nigerian government

Counseling and testing is a powerful weapon against the spread of HIV/AIDS and a key entry point for needed medical, psychological, social, and legal interventions for HIV-positive Nigerians and their families. These interventions include treatment and prevention of opportunistic infections; PMTCT; home-based care; orphan support; and

post-test clubs. CT is also a catalyst for behavior change—for clients who test HIV-negative as well as those who test positive. Clients are counseled about HIV prevention, and they develop HIV risk-reduction plans and receive referrals to post-test clubs to reinforce behavior change.

The FHI Nigeria counseling and testing program innovatively uses a variety of models in providing services. This has considerably changed the trend and uptake of CT services in most communities where stigma was high. These strategies include but not limited to the traditional VCT provided in stand alone sites, diagnostic counseling and testing, routine counseling and testing and mobile CT.

Recently, FHI Nigeria has supported the GoN to develop the first national guidelines and training curriculum for counselors to provide guidance and ensure quality of services and also supported the review of the same documents to meet the ever dynamic and changing nature of this important service. To increase and create demand for the service, culturally acceptable demand creation messages developed to assist individuals access the service, developed the Heart-to-Heart logo (national VCT logo) which was launched by His Excellency the President of Nigeria, built the capacities of 350 care providers on CT, developed strong referral network and linkages between the various services, supported GoN to establish 4 training schools, supported the change of the national HIV testing algorithm from cold chain to non-cold chain, training of non- laboratory personnel to conduct HIV counseling and testing as stipulated in the national guidelines and the development of strong monitoring system. In order to encourage more people to take the test, His Excellency the President also publicly tested for HIV on the 2006 WAD and the test was conducted by the FHI Nigeria senior Counseling and testing advisor, Cartier Simon.

A total of 440,923 persons have so far been counseled and tested since the commencement of services in 2004. These include both stand alone, mobile and integrated services. Since the commencement of mobile VCT provided by FHI in Nigeria in May 2005, 80,500 persons have been counseled and tested in communities and for MARPS (CSW, LDTR, uniformed services etc). The FHI Nigerian counseling and testing program has provided more people the opportunity to know their status in a confidential manner

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